

Chairman Brady, Ranking Member Ehlers, thank you for your leadership and for calling this important hearing today. I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the other members of the Slave Laborers Task Force at this table with me....As

Chairman, I would like to thank each and every member for their hard work, and dedication, to bringing the truth to light about the use of slave laborers in the building of the Capitol.

Mr. Chairman, imagine building this nation's Capitol with your own two hands. Imagine in Washington's oppressive summer heat, to toil under the sun without the help of a crane, a lift or any of the modern tools we have today. To fight through the bone-chilling winter, and to shiver through the blustery days of January, as you cut, chiseled and pulled massive stones out of a quarry to create the foundation, the base, of this Nation's Capitol. This Capitol, this symbol of our democracy, was not built overnight, was not built by machines. Laborers, including African-American slaves, struggled to erect this massive building brick by brick, stone by stone.

Mr. Chairman, thanks to the report by the Architect of the Capitol titled “History of Slave Laborers in the Construction of the United States Capitol” we have now compiled, and documented, the work of African-American slaves in the construction of the Capitol. We now know for certain that African-American slaves were used to construct our Nation’s Capitol. This building, from which we project the ideals of freedom, democracy and in my mind, the Beloved Community, stands grounded in a foundation laid by slaves.

We look back today, not to open old wounds, but to ensure that we tell the story of those slaves so their toils are never forgotten. Slavery is part of our Nation’s history of which we are not proud. However, we should not run away or hide from it. The history of the Capitol, like the history of our Nation, should be complete. As thousands of visitors walk through our Nation’s Capitol, they leave without knowing the true history of its construction. As visitors walk through the halls of this building, they do not see anything that tells the story of African-American

slaves who helped build this magnificent building: no drawings, no murals, no statues, nothing. We cannot allow our citizens to leave without an appreciation for the efforts of slaves who helped build our “Temple of Freedom.”

The mandate of the Slave Laborers Taskforce is to “study and recognize the contributions of enslaved African Americans in building the U.S. Capitol.” Mr. Chairman, we have accomplished the first part of this mandate. We have the study, and we know the facts. Mr. Chairman, the time is now to commemorate what for too long has been unrecognized. It is time to commemorate the role of slave laborers in the construction of the Capitol. As Chairman of the Slave Laborers Task Force, I am proud of the recommendations we are making today and I ask that we all work to ensure that these recommendations are implemented without delay.